



Bazin Defended against His Devotees

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themselves from the conventions of a narrow and repressive world. By doing so they are absorbed into a world that is more mysterious, more powerful, and ultimately more disturbing than that which we are comfortable.

The impact of the film lies in just that ability to make its audiences uncomfortable. The credit for this achievement must go to its director and his screenwriter, Cliff Green, as well as to its photographer, Russell Boyd. The film is aesthetically a visual masterpiece; its sound track one of the most unforgettable in recent years. But in its

suggestion that there is far more to our lives than the tiny framework within which we allow ourselves to interpret so-called reality, it is totally unsettling.

We are forced to recall Miranda's injunction that we are all dreams: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep." *Picnic at Hanging Rock* may be a dream, but its audiences will have difficulty rounding off their viewing of it with sleep for many nights after the dream has faded from the screen.

—ED ROGINSKI

BRIAN HENDERSON

Bazin Defended Against His Devotees

*I wept as I remembered how often you
and I
Had laughed about Los Angeles and now
'tis here you'll lie;
Here pickled in formaldehyde and painted
like a whore,
Shrimp-pink incorruptible, not lost nor
gone before.*

—Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One*

The devotees that this article defends Bazin against include François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, and Dudley Andrew. Going beyond the devotees and their claims, we will argue the relevance of Bazin's criticism to the present by showing the unrealized suggestiveness of a few of his critical notions.

We defend Bazin the critic, not Bazin the theorist. The latter we have critiqued in "Two Types of Film Theory" and others have critiqued in other pieces. Nor do we concern ourselves with the relations between Bazin's theoretical ideas, such as his filmic ontology, and his criticism. That topic was treated by us in "The Structure of Bazin's Thought," which argued a split between Bazin's theory and his historical-critical work and the various attempts by him to make conceptual bridges between the two. We are concerned with Bazin's criticism as criticism, in itself

and in its impact on later work—including that not yet done. We will look especially at a Bazinian distinction between two kinds of director, exemplified by Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini, and at its reverberations in later film criticism. We will also look briefly at Bazin's analyses of *mise-en-scène* and narrative technique in Rossellini, noting how uncannily well they fit films made by him after Bazin's death in 1958. As an example of this, we will apply Bazin's notion of Rossellini's method as "synthetic and elliptical" to a later Rossellini film, *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* (1966).

François Truffaut has cast himself as the proprietor of the memory of André Bazin, perhaps from the time of Bazin's death in 1958, but more pointedly in a series of writings he has devoted to Bazin since 1971. Since 1971 Truffaut has written the preface or foreword to seven books concerning Bazin. Two were for American books, Hugh Gray's translation of *What Is Cinema? Vol. II* (1971) and Dudley Andrew's *André Bazin* (1978). Five were for French books, two of which have been translated, Bazin's *Jean Renoir* (1971; 1973) and *Orson Welles* (1972; 1978). The preface to a collection of Bazin pieces, *Charlie Chaplin* (1973) is translated in *The Films in My Life* (1975; 1978), though the book itself is untranslated. Also un-

translated are two 1975 collections, mainly of previously unpublished material, *Le Cinéma de la cruauté* and *Le Cinéma de l'occupation et de la résistance*, both with prefaces by Truffaut. The introduction to his own book, *The Films in My Life*, has a few mentions of Bazin, though his introduction to *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel* (1970; 1971) does not mention him, even though it is autobiographical in nature.

By editing the unfinished Renoir and Welles books and the two 1975 collections, Truffaut becomes the curator of the Bazin museum as well as the proprietor of his memory. How does Truffaut perform his archival tasks? We might wish to obtain Bazin's uncollected writings and unfinished books at a faster rate and with more exact scholarship; but how many scholars take even longer to get their books out and do not make a feature film a year? Perhaps there is no Bazin book that would not have appeared without Truffaut's participation (though we do not know this), but there can be no doubt that Truffaut, far more widely known than Bazin, has contributed significantly to the dissemination of Bazin's work. In so doing he has also created a myth of André Bazin: this is our concern here. But we have undeniable cause to be grateful for Truffaut's editing and sponsorship.

Writing a number of forewords does not thereby make one the proprietor of one's subject's memory. But Truffaut has been on hand to remember Bazin and to introduce his work on nearly every official occasion since at least 1971. He has written foreword, preface, or introduction to all but one or two Bazin books that have appeared in French or English in the seventies. Truffaut asserts his proprietary role in other ways also, for example in presenting Dudley Andrews's biography of Bazin.

Though I was the intimate friend of Bazin and became, you might say, his adopted son, until a time when I felt I was actually becoming a brother to him, I nevertheless knew only one part of his life. And even here this biography has revealed to me all sorts of details I had no notion of.¹

Truffaut confers his approval on someone else's biography of his subject in a rhetorical form that consolidates his own role the more strongly: Andrews turns up things that *even I did not know*.

What qualifies Truffaut to be Bazin's editor and introducer? First, his historical association with him and close memories of him. This is a

figure of the culture generally, underlying the institution of the foreword itself. The foreword provides a glimpse of the author himself, something beyond his mere words: direct testimony of his being. The person most qualified to do this is the one who knew him best; but that person should ideally be a figure of culture himself, for his task is to mediate the realm of being and the realm of the word, to render the one into the other. One of the functions of the foreword writer is therefore to qualify himself as bearer of the privileged vision of the dead author. I knew X, I saw Y. I was the man, I was there. It follows that every foreword necessarily concerns both the object of the foreword and its writer. Moreover, by the nature of foreword-writing, these terms cannot be separate or fixed—they are interrelated and interactive. It is a double-mirror operation: the foreword-writer establishes his involvement with the author. A certain image of the author is projected. This image necessarily reflects the writer of the foreword in a certain way. He casts a light on his subject that reflects back on him. He projects an image that projects an image of him.

What does Truffaut remember of Bazin? The same stories, comparisons, observations, praises, even verbal constructions turn up in Truffaut's various writings on Bazin. He was kind, he was logical, everyone loved him, his goodness was legendary—it even embarrassed his young followers like Truffaut. Truffaut spends far more time on Bazin the Good Man than on Bazin the critic. As for Bazin's work, Truffaut notes many times that Bazin was not a critic, he was a writer of the cinema. He did not evaluate films, he described them superbly and showed how they were made. He was "something more than a critic: a veritable *écrivain de cinéma*." And on another occasion: "More than a critic, he was a 'writer of the cinema,' striving to describe films rather than to judge them." Truffaut's repeated insistence on this point in his seventies pieces—it is absent from his 1959 *Cahiers* memorial of Bazin—recalls his admission in the introduction to *The Films in My Life* (1978):

American critics seem to me better than the European critics . . . By a simple law of life, we quite easily adopt notions that serve our purpose. And it is true that American critics have been more positive about my films than my compatriots have. So watch out.²

It is almost entirely in the seventies pieces that Truffaut creates the myth of André Bazin the Good Man and André Bazin the Uncritical Critic. It might be that Truffaut did this in reaction to hostile French criticism, especially left criticism, of his work in the late sixties and seventies. Andrew Sarris, not a Marxist, noted that in *Stolen Kisses* (1968) Antoine Doinel watches a student demonstration on television as though it were an event taking place on another planet. Against his compatriots, Truffaut resurrects the ideal figure of Bazin to stand over and dwarf harsh, dismissive critics, who merely reflect their own times. In this vein Truffaut cites in one place the unprecedented praise of Bazin by film-makers at his death and, in another, Bazin's refusal to dismiss Kurosawa, as others did, because Mizoguchi was greater. "Unquestionably anyone who prefers Kurosawa must be incurably blind but anyone who loves only Mizoguchi is one-eyed. Throughout the arts there runs a vein of the contemplative and mystical as well as an expressionist vein." This comes from the 1971 foreword to the English edition of *What Is Cinema? Vol. II*, apparently the first Bazin preface that Truffaut did: It is tempting to read Godard for Mizoguchi and Truffaut for Kurosawa. In the 1977 foreword to Dudley Andrew's biography, Truffaut says

Bazin was forty when he died; he would have been nearly sixty today and his presence would have helped to dissipate the thick fog in which cinematographic reflection finds itself. To be a critic in 1978 is much more difficult than it was in 1958, first of all because production has become enormously diversified at the same time that the ambitions of filmmakers have grown. Nowadays, at the end of any given year of cinema, it is much more difficult for a dozen observers of good faith to agree on the titles of those films which have a chance for survival.¹

There is an important diachronic dimension to Truffaut's promotion of the Bazin myth—it changes: though Bazin has not changed since 1958, Truffaut's statements about him have changed. The specific direction of change is toward greater and greater idealization of Bazin. Our point of reference must be Truffaut's statement in the January 1959 memorial *Cahiers* issue on Bazin, "It was Good To Be Alive." In this piece alone is there a sense of flesh and blood and a fresh taste of grief. Besides saying as usual that Bazin was "a father to me" and "I am probably the one he helped the most" and "his intelli-

gence . . . kindness . . . honesty . . . logic" and "he remained himself on every circumstance," there are other remarks that occur only here. "He had bitter memories of his stay in the Army and his career as a teacher," and "he could sketch psychoanalytic portraits of people that were astonishingly accurate." In the later forewords, Bazin has no bitter memories and he is far too busy being saintly to people to sketch them psychoanalytically. Even a note in the 1959 statement about what happened "once his indignation was aroused" does not occur again. How far from this to Truffaut's remark in the 1971 foreword to *What Is Cinema? Vol. II*: "If I were asked to give a picture of André Bazin the first thing that would occur to me would be a caption from an American magazine: 'The most unforgettable character I've met.'" (p. v)

Truffaut's presentation of himself also changes from 1959 to the 1970s. There is a note about himself in the 1959 piece that is dropped from all his later statements.

I was languishing in the prison of Dupleix Barracks in Paris, along with a handful of deserters from the French battalion in Korea. There were a dozen of us in a cell built for four; the August heat and the smell of urine emanating from an old tin can made the air unbreathable; we would take turns climbing up along the door to breathe the air coming through a window overlooking the courtyard.⁴

Compare this passage to one in the 1970 Introduction to *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel*:

I experienced at first hand what I show in *The Four-Hundred Blows*: the cages in the police station with the prostitutes, the ride in the police van, the criminal-records routine and the prison cells; without going into all the ugly details,

I can testify that what I went through was considerably tougher than what is shown in the film.⁵

How one misses the smell of piss in everything that Truffaut has done since *The Four-Hundred Blows*.

It must be said, however, that Bazin contributed to the joint myths too, at least by dedicating Tome I of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* to Roger Leenhardt and François Truffaut. In that Leenhardt was Bazin's ancestor in writing about films for *Espirit* and in other ways, the joint dedication pointedly declares Truffaut his heir. An odd, oblique consequence of this that neither Bazin nor many others "would ever have dared imagine" is Truffaut's appearance as the international scientist in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*

(1977). Who is this intelligent, kind, honest, logical man, who treats all creatures the same but the Bazin of Truffaut's myth? When he shakes hands with the diminutive space person (the young Truffaut?), we realize that Truffaut has simultaneously taken over the Bazin role in his myth and reduced it to a cartoon.

Eric Rohmer is a serious and distinguished film scholar. He wrote *Hitchcock* with Claude Chabrol in 1957. In 1977 he published his 1972 doctoral dissertation, "L'organisation de l'espace dans le 'Faust' de Murnau." We are not interested here in Rohmer's critical work as a whole nor in his overall view of Bazin and its changes from year to year. We are interested in only one writing, his review of *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma, Tome I* in 1959, because it states strongly one approach to Bazin.

Each essay and indeed the whole work itself fits perfectly into the pattern of a mathematical demonstration. Without any doubt, the whole body of Bazin's work is based on one central idea, an affirmation of the objectivity of the cinema in the same way as all geometry is centered on the properties of the straight line.⁹

Rohmer suggests the independence of the axiom to its particular applications. Thus Bazin should not be treated as bound to the films he chose to discuss: neorealism and depth of focus may give way to other styles and techniques without affecting Bazin's argument. Bazin was not fundamentally concerned with these movements and techniques but with cinema's link to reality.

Rohmer's piece is not concerned with Bazin the good man, but with Bazin the logician. Whether this image of Bazin is less a myth than Truffaut's remains to be seen.

Dudley Andrew's biography indulges somewhat in both myths. There are pages on Bazin's love of animals and his kindness to humans, but for the most part Andrew stays with events, friends, writings, and intellectual milieu. Indeed nearly half the book deals with the intellectual and other influences that formed Bazin: personalism, existentialism, Leenhardt, *Travail et Culture*, etc. The second half of the book is largely devoted to tracing the writing of Bazin's major articles, but this continues the inquiry of the first half because it emphasizes the relation of the articles to the intellectual matrix that formed Bazin. This emphasis slights many things we want to know: Bazin's interactions with Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette, Renoir, Rossellini, Buñuel, Leenhardt,

etc. It also tends to be idealist if not solipsistic: minds create ideas out of other ideas. Account for those influences and their consequences (usually seen as simple applications) and you've done the job of intellectual biography. On the whole—perhaps just because it is a full-length study—Andrew's book takes a step away from the mythological Bazin, though it does not entirely detach itself from the phantasm created by the projections of his devotees, and indeed in part contributes to it.

The approaches to Bazin of Truffaut, Rohmer, and Andrew are quite distinct, though they also share important features. Indeed, consider the possibility that their differences mask a common structure, that they are subsets of a single conceptual set. First, all posit Bazin's work as a unity of some sort; second, all three approaches tie up Bazin in a completed past, however differently conceived. The effect of both features is to seal Bazin and his influence in the past and, despite what appears to be the case, to deny his influence to the present.

It is clear that Truffaut's Good Man Bazin, whom he compares to *Good Sam*, is locked in the past, in the perfect unity of his goodness. No more will he touch another heart. As for his work, one wonders sometimes how much Truffaut believes in it, except as grist for the memorial. He says of *Jean Renoir*, "the best book by the best critic on the best director," but three superlatives without elaboration is a little hollow. (Truffaut does not say this for the Orson Welles book—Peter Bogdanovich does: "The most influential modern film critic writing about the most influential modern film director—who could ask for anything more?") As for Bazin's influence, is there not sometimes a suggestion that Bazin has had his important influence already—on Truffaut himself? Beyond this, Truffaut's attitude to Bazin seems sometimes oddly protective. His claims for Bazin are very general and idealized, as though he was not sure what specific claims to make for him. Oddly, Andrew's book makes no overall claims for Bazin either.

Rohmer's unity thesis is ultimate: Bazin had one idea, which was so pure that even applications and extensions do not dilute it. The latter are in any case dispensable and superfluous. Rohmer's thesis keeps Bazin rolled up in the past, indeed within his own past. It denies even

the time of Bazin's life and work as so much secondary elaboration of an idea that was pure from its inception.

In presenting the intellectual sources of Bazin's work, Andrew's book necessarily moves away from the present and toward the past. He moves forward in time to show how a Mounier or Leenhardt idea shapes a later Bazin text; but this is a two-way trolley between early Bazin and late Bazin—it never gets to the present. In Andrew's case, the issue of the unity of Bazin or of his work is treated more complexly. He flirts with the notion that Bazin's life was a unity in a more sophisticated version of Truffaut's St. Francis image. He even anchors the point with a sketch of Bazin's childhood in the country. He is tempted by but resists Rohmer's thesis of Bazin's intellectual unity. Andrew shows that personalism stressed the necessity of engagement with the world, with the other, and that Bazin's work reflects this.

Thus Rohmer may be correct in asserting that Bazin's theory goes far beyond the films he speaks of, but the impetus to develop such a theory was derived from specific films seen within the specific context of personalism. Film is not mathematics. One does not begin theorizing about it in the abstract. Bazin brought to his study of film a complex notion of reality and man's place within it.⁷

The unity that emerges from Andrew's book is that of a man and his times. Andrew traces Bazin as a thread—a thinking thread—weaving itself into the fabric of its intellectual and social context. Bazin in his times, Bazin in relation to his time, Bazin and his times, make a whole, a unity, something perfect, finished, complete, sufficient unto itself. (Is this itself something like the personalist view? Personalism may be not only a topic in Andrew's saga of André Bazin but the ideological orientation of his book itself.)

What all the devotees lack is a sense of how to use Bazin. One is not sure that they want to use him. All tend to seal Bazin and his work into a completed past, unified, perfect, inaccessible to the present. They all stand vigil at the memorial. The torch is not passed.

None of the work we have considered is transitive. None moves from Bazin to the present, or even toward it. A new reading or presentation of a critic will usually relate the work to the critical present, to make it relevant and useful in new, unforeseen ways. At least it will sum up or state strongly the bearing of the figure on the

present. The failure even to attempt this is the most amazing aspect of the work of Bazin's devotees.

One need hardly argue the influence of Bazin's writings on later film scholarship. It would be a laborious demonstration, but useful. One wishes Andrew had done it—A Survey of Bazinian Scholarship—as Chapter 8 of his book, or as an appendix. But we are more interested in something else: Bazin's influence today and tomorrow, his unrealized influence, what he has to say to the cutting edge of contemporary film criticism (if there are two people who can agree on what that is). Our question is—Why read Bazin today? To read him as classic, as necessary film culture places him in the past, where the devotees venerate. Is there any other reason to read Bazin now?

A precondition for a new reading of Bazin is to shatter the image of the unity of Bazin's work, insisted on by his devotees. Quite simply, we must be willing to read each of Bazin's critical pieces on its own terms. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, there are two ways not to read Bazin. One is not to read him, the other is to read every piece as an emanation of his ontology, and to dismiss it on that ground. Certain sophisticated journals like *Ça* and *Screen* do this regularly.

"The Structure of Bazin's Thought" demonstrates a theoretical economy for reading Bazin's criticism apart from his ontological theory of film.

There is no logical connection or carry-over between the "Ontology" and the critical work . . . The historical criticism . . . is internally structured by an art-historical division of function between period-style analyses and criticism of individual artists and works within these periods . . . This context defines and controls the meaning of all terms used within it.

The individual essays sometimes use the term 'realism' . . . to describe the particular qualities of a director's style: he speaks of Visconti's "aesthetic realism," Fellini's "poetic realism," etc. In this usage, it is not the term "realism" itself, but how Bazin qualifies that term that is the center of the critical act. "Realism" becomes the name of the problem to be solved, a kind of "X." When Bazin has defined the kind of realism a director practices, he has defined his style.⁸

This theoretical model urges the disunity of Bazin's corpus and calls for a differentiated reading of each of his writings. It resembles the eating of the dead rich man by his heirs in *Satyricon* rather than the Holy Eucharist, in which all of

God is present in every piece of broken bread.

Let us take a figure of equal interest to Bazin and to us: Roberto Rossellini. The problem of Rossellini cuts through modern film criticism. He has been of central interest, at different times, to neorealists, oldline communists, and humanists; to the fifties *Cahiers* group, who heralded his films with Ingrid Bergman as the dawn of a new cinema; to Marxists of the Brecht-Godard era, interested in his antispectacular historical films; to semioticians and materialists like the *Screen* group, who devoted one issue (v. 14/4, Winter 1973-4) and part of another issue (v.15/1, Spring 1974) to Rossellini.

But no approach to Rossellini has been completely successful at any time. Perhaps none has been very successful at all. There has been no systematic study of Rossellini and no complete critical account of his work by any method. Almost two years after his death, almost forty years after the making of his first film, Rossellini is still very much in question, in a way that Fellini, Bergman, Antonioni—even Godard—are not. Indeed there may be more doubt about his methods and meanings now than there ever has been. An indication of this is the Winter 1973-4 *Screen* issue, which has no critical writing on Rossellini whatever, let alone a critical approach. It limited itself to presenting background materials on Rossellini, mostly in translation—three interviews, a statement by the film-maker, and an article on the neorealist ideological milieu by Mario Canella—postponing to the future a critical confrontation with Rossellini.

What do we find in Bazin on Rossellini that we do not find in the work mentioned above? We do not find a systematic study or complete critical account in any sense. Bazin does not provide an overview of Rossellini—he does not even deal fully with any one film by him. But Bazin's writings on Rossellini, brief and fragmentary as they are, are suggestive in ways that other writing on him has not been. Bazin discusses Rossellini in at least four texts: "De Sica, Metteur en Scène" (1951); "An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation" (1948); "*Europa 51*" (1951); and "In Defense of Rossellini" (1955).⁹ The De Sica piece was an introduction to an Italian book on De Sica. Rossellini is brought in as con-

trast in order to define two kinds of director and two kinds of *mise-en-scène*. After seeing *The Bicycle Thief* and *Miracle in Milan*, the two mature films of De Sica (whom Bazin calls a "genius" and "a director of the first order"), Bazin still cannot determine "the permanent and definitive characteristics of their maker's talent," hence he has no idea what De Sica will make next. The reason is that De Sica is one of those directors whose sole purpose is to interpret their scenarios faithfully, whose one method of work seems to be to treat their subject honestly.

(His neutrality) divides up the output of the film maker into so many special cases that, given one more film, all that has preceded it might be called into question. It is a temptation therefore to see only craftsmanship where one is looking for style, the generous humility of a clever technician meeting the demands of the subject instead of the creative imprint of a true *auteur*.¹⁰

By contrast, Bazin could have deduced the permanent and definitive characteristics of Rossellini's talent after *Open City* and *Paisà*. His style belongs to a different aesthetic family, in which a vision of the world and the *mise-en-scène* are closely related. Rossellini's style is a way of seeing (while De Sica's is primarily a way of feeling); his *mise-en-scène* lays siege to the object from outside.

Rossellini's direction comes between his material and us, not as an artificial obstacle set up between the two, but as an unbridgeable, ontological distance, a congenital weakness of the human being which expresses itself aesthetically in terms of space, in forms, in the structure of the *mise-en-scène*. Because we are aware of it as a lack, a refusal, an escape from things, and hence finally as a kind of pain, it follows that it is easier for us to be aware of it, easier for us to reduce it to a formal method. Rossellini cannot alter this without himself passing through a personal moral revolution.¹¹

Note that the next generation of film critics, the auteurs, accepted Bazin's distinction between De Sica and Rossellini as two fundamentally different kinds of director and also his grounds for the distinction. What was different were the *values* with which they invested the distinction. Bazin was sincere in calling De Sica a genius; for him De Sica had and would always have a very high place among the great directors, not far below Rossellini himself. The younger generation elevated Rossellini to the stratosphere and dropped De Sica entirely, strictly on Bazin's grounds. To them cleverness in adapting a scenario to the

screen was nothing; formulating a *mise-en-scène* that was a vision of the world and that one imposed on every piece of material one dealt with—was everything.

The auteurist critics revered Rossellini but they actually wrote rather little about him. There are fewer auteur studies of Rossellini than of Hitchcock, Hawks, Renoir, or a dozen others. It may be that they did not quite know what to do with him. It may be that they deferred to Bazin on this subject (even when he was silent), either accepting what he said or otherwise declining to compete with him. But Rossellini made an enormous impact on the younger generation nonetheless—something we deduce from their shouts of glory and other elliptical remarks about him. In June 1959 Godard said "In a future issue, I shall show why *India* [1958] is the creation of the world."¹² He never did, becoming not the last and probably not the first film critic to renege on a promise to explain Rossellini. Instead, one is tempted to say, he shot *Breathless* (in August 1959) and a number of other films that betray knowledge of the "aesthetic secrets" of Rossellini, without however betraying the secrets themselves. These he kept to himself.

Truffaut's piece on Rossellini, "Roberto Rossellini Prefers Real Life," was written in 1963. He says that "Rossellini doesn't really like cinema particularly, any more than he cares for the arts in general. He prefers life, he prefers man." Truffaut recounts that he was Rossellini's assistant for three years, in which the master did not shoot a single foot of film.

Was I influenced by Rossellini? By all means. His severity, his seriousness, his thoughtfulness freed me from some of the complacent enthusiasm I'd felt for American movies. Rossellini detests clever titles, especially with scenes preceding them, flashbacks, and everything in general that's included simply for decoration, everything that does not serve the film's intention or the character development.

In some of my films I've tried to follow a single character simply and honestly in an almost documentary manner, and I owe this method to Rossellini.¹³

In what Truffaut films has he *not* followed this method? In two or three at most. Truffaut also described Rossellini's meeting with the "new wave"—to-be in the fifties, seeing their short films, encouraging them, helping them to get backing when they moved to features. Truffaut calls him "the father of the new wave." This dossier is not

only open, as far as Anglo-American film criticism and film history are concerned, it is virtually empty. James Monaco's recent *The New Wave* has half a dozen references to Rossellini, usually as one of a number of figures bearing on some general point or other.

In any case, it is perhaps a shame that Bazin's distinction was lost beneath an avalanche of auteurist values. However interesting his distinction may be as a paradigm of directors, it is perhaps more interesting as a proposition about Rossellini himself. In the last analysis, Rossellini's work is probably not a good example of anything but itself; as lawyers say, hard cases make bad law. Rossellini and *what* other directors impose a distinctive *mise-en-scène* upon diverse materials as Rossellini does? Indeed, has any other director treated the range of materials that Rossellini has? What is needed is a Bazin book exploring Rossellini's *mise-en-scène* in relation to his materials, film-by-film. One dealing with Rossellini's work through 1956 or 1957 would do nicely. I would gladly trade both the Renoir book and the Welles book for it.

Besides Rossellini's *mise-en-scène*, Bazin has discussed in several places, and generally in greater detail, Rossellini's "narrative technique." The first instance is an eight-page section by that name in the 1948 essay "An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation." (Though its section on "narrative technique" deals extensively with *Paisà*, it is sometimes unclear whether a point applies to that film specifically or to neorealism generally. He says in one passage: "In *Paisà* (and I repeat that I imply by this, in varying degrees, all Italian films) . . .".) Bazin proceeds by citing a passage from *Paisà* then commenting on it.

A small group of Italian partisans and Allied soldiers have been given a supply of food by a family of fisher folk living in an isolated farmhouse in the heart of the marshlands of the Po delta. Having been handed a basket of eels, they take off. Some while later, a German patrol discovers this, and executes the inhabitants of the farm. 2. An American officer and a partisan are wandering at twilight in the marshes. There is a burst of gunfire in the distance. From a highly elliptical conversation we gather that the Germans have shot the fishermen. 3. The dead bodies of the men and women lie stretched out in front of the little farmhouse. In the twilight, a half-naked baby cries endlessly.

Even with such a succinct description, this fragment of

the story reveals enormous ellipses—or rather, great holes. A complex train of action is reduced to three or four brief fragments, in themselves already elliptical enough in comparison with the reality they are unfolding. . . . How did the Germans discover that the parents were guilty? How is it that the child is still alive? That is not the film's concern, and yet a whole train of connected events led to this particular outcome. In any case, the film maker does not ordinarily show us everything. That is impossible—but the things he selects and the things he leaves out tend to form a logical pattern by way of which the mind passes easily from cause to effect. The technique of Rossellini undoubtedly maintains an intelligible succession of events, but these do not mesh like a chain with the sprockets of a wheel. The mind has to leap from one event to the other as one leaps from stone to stone in crossing a river. . . . In the usual shooting script (according to a process resembling the classical novel form) the fact comes under the scrutiny of the camera, is divided up, analyzed, and put together again, undoubtedly without entirely losing its factual nature; but the latter, presumably, is enveloped in abstraction, as the clay of a brick is enveloped by the wall which is not as yet present but which will multiply its parallelepipeds. For Rossellini, facts take on a meaning, but not like a tool whose function has predetermined its form.¹⁴

In the 1955 piece "In Defense of Rossellini," Bazin says:

Neorealism contrasts with the realist aesthetics that preceded it, and in particular with naturalism and verism, in that its realism is not so much concerned with the choice of subject as with a particular way of regarding things. If you like, what is realist in *Paisà* is the Italian Resistance, but what is neorealist is Rossellini's direction—his presentation of the events, a presentation which is at once elliptic and synthetic.¹⁵

In "De Sica: *Metteur en Scène*" (1951) Bazin again speaks of Rossellini and ellipsis:

But it is perhaps especially the structure of the narrative which is most radically turned upside down. It must now respect the actual duration of the event. The cuts that logic demands can only be, at best, descriptive. The assemblage of the film must never add anything to the existing reality. If it is part of the meaning of the film as with Rossellini, it is because the empty gaps, the white spaces, the parts of the event that we are not given, are themselves of a concrete nature: stones which are missing from the building. It is the same in life: we do not know everything that happens to others. Ellipsis in classical montage is an effect of style. In Rossellini's films it is a lacuna in reality, or rather in the knowledge we have of it, which is by its nature limited.¹⁶

Several points are clear from these passages. One is that Bazin makes a number of acute points about the narrative technique of Rossellini's films, from *Paisà* (1946) to *Voyage In Italy* (1954). These center around his refinements of the notion of ellipsis in regard to Rossellini. In so doing, Bazin suggests that ellipsis is fundamental

to all film-making but that Rossellini is a special case—his work is more elliptical, more radically elliptical, or uses ellipsis in a different way than usual. Unfortunately Bazin does not elucidate the general case nor the relation of the special case to it. Indeed he does not say much about the case of Rossellini itself, though what he says is suggestive. Another point that emerges from these passages is that Bazin turns his analysis of ellipsis in cinema generally and in Rossellini in particular toward his realist notions at every point. Rather they seem to arise together and to be thoroughly intertwined, even if we sense at other times that they struggle with each other.

Bazin did not, however, invent the realist interpretation of cinematic ellipsis. Roger Leenhardt wrote about cinema for *Esprit* from 1934 and had a great influence on Bazin (see Andrew, pp. 30–37, especially). He wrote in 1936:

And the proper role of the *mise-en-scène* of the production will be to give the impression that there is no *mise-en-scène*. Not a studied creation of "significance" by means of acting and decor, but a simple job of "rendering." Not a willful artistry of expression, but a technical effort at description. Precisely because of this primordial realism, it (the proper role of the *mise-en-scène*) is not in the cinematographic material or, if I may say so, in art, but only in connections, comparisons, and ellipses.¹⁷

Andrew comments:

When Leenhardt claims that the primary figure of cinema is the ellipsis not the metaphor, he is insisting that cinema is not a symbol system substituting one set of signs for another (as classical film aesthetics believed), but an always partial view of something significant that tries to appear through it.¹⁸

Leenhardt and Bazin conjoin the notion of ellipsis with the notion of cinematic realism, advancing the proposition that ellipsis somehow works on reality itself in cinema rather than on cinematic discourse. This usage goes quite against usage of the term in rhetorical texts (ancient, mediaeval, modern) and in contemporary (post) structuralist texts as well. Perhaps it is the product of a French classical education and a period and school of thought predisposed to a realist ontology. In any case, once Bazin had identified cinema with reality itself—and had banished figures such as metaphor—he was perhaps committed to such a view.

Ellipsis is, of course, a geometric figure as well as a grammatical and rhetorical one. Its two

senses derive from a single Greek word, *elleipsis*, which means "defective" or "to come short." The geometric ellipsis is a conic section in which the inclination of the cutting plane to the base "comes short of" the inclination of the side of the cone. The angle that it makes with the side of the cone is smaller than that of a circular section parallel to the base of the cone. The grammatical definition of ellipsis is "the omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense." It is interesting that Anglo-American dictionaries and books defining literary terms nearly always give a linguistic or grammatical definition of ellipsis, not a rhetorical one; they address ellipsis in the sentence rather than in discourse. It was such an emphasis of linguistic study that led discourse analysts, especially in the early days, to speak of discourse as "a large sentence."

Seymour Chatman, a contemporary rhetorician and discourse analyst, devotes several pages to ellipsis in *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Chatman distinguishes discourse-time, the time it takes to peruse the discourse, from story-time, the duration of the purported events of the narrative. Ellipsis refers to a narrative discontinuity, between story and discourse. In ellipsis, the discourse halts, though time continues to pass in the story. Chatman distinguishes carefully between ellipsis and the "cut" between shots in the cinema. Ellipsis refers to a narrative discontinuity (between story and discourse); the cut is the *manifestation* of ellipsis as a process in a specific medium.

A cut may convey ellipsis, but it may simply represent a shift in space, that is, connecting two actions that are absolutely or virtually continuous, as when shot A shows a man with his hand turning a doorknob and drawing the door toward him, and then, after the cut, a reverse shot B from out in the hall shows the same door opening, now inwards, toward the camera, and the man emerging. The discourse is no less continuous than the story in this instance; the cut is simply necessitated by the spatial problem of passing the camera through the wall. [(S)ometimes it can be difficult to tell whether a given cut signals a flashback, a flashforward, or simply an ellipsis followed by the next (spatially removed) event in the story.] And so with the other transitions of cinematic technology—the dissolve, the wipe, iris in and out, and so forth. These are all in the repertoire of cinematic manifestation, not parts of narrative discourse. In themselves they have no

specific narrative meanings. Only the context can tell us whether a given dissolve means "several weeks later" or "several weeks earlier" or "meanwhile, in another part of town."¹⁹

Godard's films, like Rossellini's before him, often cover significant ellipses with a simple cut. In *Masculin Féminin* (1966), Paul is alive in the penultimate sequence, complaining to Madeline about sharing their bed with her friend. The last scene takes place in a police station. It is almost over before we realize that what the girls are reporting is Paul's death, an event not only elided but completely unprepared for and, seemingly, barely communicated to us at all. In *Le Mépris* (1963), another Paul sets out on his bicycle from the studio and arrives at Prokosch's villa after a straight cut. From the context it is clear, or it becomes clear, that the trip took at least thirty minutes—enough time for Camille and Prokosch to make love, were they so inclined.

It would be absurd to say that Paul's death in *Masculin Féminin* is "a lacuna in reality." It is a lacuna in the narration only. Indeed a series of such presentations by Godard in the sixties led viewers to say that such events were "arbitrary" or "unbelievable." Others said that such discursive events foregrounded the artificial, discursive nature of narrative itself, "denaturalized" it. Both sets of reactions took place within a set of conventional expectations concerning what film narratives were: Godard's selective, slight variations on convention were perceived as defeating, exposing, or failing of narrative, depending on one's perspective. But, as Chatman says, ellipsis is as old as *The Iliad*, though he also points out that ellipsis of a particularly broad and abrupt sort is characteristic of modern narratives. But this does not make them more or less or other than narratives.

Nor are the ellipses in Rossellini "lacunae in reality." Bazin's conjunction of ellipsis with realism is both mistaken and unuseful. But this does not mean that Bazin's suggestions concerning ellipsis in Rossellini must be rejected along with his realist reading. In this case it seems rather easy to dissociate them. Since Bazin has misapplied the notion of realism to ellipsis in the first place, that notion may be discarded without damage to the underlying rhetorical argument. Ellipsis was never understood to apply to "reality,"

only to discourse. Bazin's making a case for their conjunction is itself a *tour de force* of analytic reasoning or of casuistry, depending on how one views it.

The Rise to Power of Louis XIV (1966) inaugurates the third period of Rossellini's work, after the neorealist films and the films with Ingrid Bergman: the historical cycle that continued until his death in 1977. In fact Rossellini made historical films as early as *Viva L'Italia* (1960) and fiction films as late as "Illibatezza" in *ROGOPAG* (1962). Thus *The Age of Iron* (1964) begins that phase of his work devoted exclusively to historical subjects, strictly speaking, but *Louis XIV* remains its most widely seen instance. Rossellini's method of film-making changes in important ways in this last period, but close examination of *Louis XIV* and the other films reveals that Bazin's formula "synthetic and elliptical" applies to them too, even if the meaning of the phrase is thereby altered somewhat.

Louis XIV treats an historical subject in an elliptical manner; but its ellipses are no more "lacunae in reality" than are ellipses in a fiction film. There was indeed a Louis XIV, but we have no direct knowledge of him. For us Louis XIV is a creature of texts—original sources of multifarious kinds, countless biographies, textbook accounts, paintings, previous films, etc. The script for *Louis XIV*, based on a scenario by Philippe Erlanger, is extremely elliptical in relation to Erlanger's long 1965 biography of Louis's entire life. *Louis XIV*, like the Rossellini films discussed by Bazin, is structured by ellipsis. Unlike them it shows how ellipsis may also be used to develop an historical interpretation. The film's interpretation may be judged purely on internal textual evidence, what Rossellini includes in relation to what he does not include; just as *Paisà* and *Voyage In Italy* may be judged this way. Or, unlike the earlier films, it may be judged with history book in hand—what it includes in relation to what it excludes.

I divide the film into twenty sequences, a scheme of segmentation that cannot be defended here. 1-10, concerned with the death of Mazarin and its immediate consequences, cover less than three days. 11-20, concerned with Louis's longer-range securing of his power, take place over twenty-one years (1661-1688). It follows that the

ellipses of 1-10 are relatively short and those of 11-20 extremely long; but they are determined by a single principle. The film as a whole studies the seizure of power by Louis XIV—it is concerned with a process not a person. Its compositional strategy, which is also its strategy of ellipsis, is to include those events essential to this process and to exclude everything else. This principle of inclusion and exclusion is carried through rigorously. Contrary to what many critics have said, there are no scenes included for historical background or period flavor; none is included as historical description of the seventeenth century generally, materialist or otherwise. Once a scene is included—its boundaries determined exactly by its pertinence to the seizure process—it may be realized with a multi-layered complexity that Bazin called "synthesis."

1-10 begins with the treatment of Mazarin by the Parisian physicians. Colbert's discussion with Mazarin leads the latter to ask to see the king when he awakes. The king sees Mazarin and is alarmed; he affirms to his mother the need to make the state a reality. Mazarin dies, Louis orders deep mourning and convenes the Council for the next day. At the Council meeting he tells all ministers to report to him. Later he tells Colbert to consult him daily. 11-20 concern problems of consolidating Louis's power: excluding his mother from the Council (11), the Fouquet affair (12-14), preparing styles of dress and Versailles (15-17), the operation of Louis's system of gathering the nobles at Versailles, making them dependent upon his wealth and favor (18-20).

There is not space here to present a full analysis of *Louis XIV*, let alone to review the large critical literature on it. Suffice it to say that some highly intelligent critics have gone awry on *Louis* by missing what Bazin grasped as Rossellini's "elliptical and synthetic" method. Paul Schrader said "The facts of the past (are) framed and organized in such a manner as to reveal *their*—not Rossellini's, not our—intrinsic truth."²⁰ James Roy MacBean said:

Throughout the film each successive sequence has a twofold function in which information is presented to advance the chronological story-line and, at the same time, to analyze different aspects of the historical period. That the former is often less important than the latter is illustrated best, I

think, by the doctor's examination of the ailing Mazarin. In terms of the story-line, this sequence is disproportionately long: all we really need to know is who Mazarin is . . . and not *how* he died but simply *that* he died . . . So the doctor's examination becomes Rossellini's examination of the state of man's scientific knowledge in seventeenth-century France. And what more telling index could there be of man's knowledge than his knowledge of his own *materiality*?²¹

MacBean is partly right, but there is no split between the two functions he specifies, at least not on the point he makes here. *When Mazarin* dies is a matter of fundamental importance to the seizure of power by Louis XIV or anyone else; hence a scene of his treatment by his physicians, hence seventeenth-century science. The point about bleeding may be not simply that it is "wrong," that it "hastens" Mazarin's death by comparison to the present; but also that it regulates the dying process. Mazarin will die, but not before he has heard Colbert's alarms about the court and not before he has alerted and counseled the king. The true calamity, for Louis, would be for Mazarin to die suddenly, so as to prevent planning and execution of his seizure of power.

Jose Luis Guarner says that "This *coup d'état* took place over a fairly long period in history . . . It has been compressed, by a considerable feat, into the length of a normal film."²² Guarner's point raises a nice question. Let us say that there can be no compression (or condensation) without ellipsis—unless we merely do a speed-up like playing a 33 r.p.m. record at 78 r.p.m. or like showing a silent film at sound speed (or faster). But not every use of ellipsis results in compression. Rossellini does not compress Louis's life nor his career as monarch: vast areas of each are not touched on at all—Louis's foreign wars, court intrigues other than Fouquet's, etc. In relation to the *coup* itself, the film does not compress either—it gives as many *coup* events, and as much of each event, as it considers essential. In any case, it is not "a considerable feat"—it is merely a matter of knowing what you are interested in.

"Synthesis" may ultimately be a harder problem than ellipsis, involving as it does questions of verisimilitude, of "historical background," of the "deeper, structural historical factors," and many other problems that cannot be pursued here. Alas, Bazin too had less to say about "synthesis" than about "ellipsis" or, more precisely,

about that synthesis that goes with and complements ellipsis. He had nothing at all to say about the "economic" problem of how the two factors work together, how a variation in the radicality of the ellipsis may affect the synthesis of elements in the scenes included.

Genette shows that Proust's ellipses in the *Récherche* become increasingly abrupt, perhaps as compensation for the fact that the scenes between, though they cover shorter and shorter periods of story-time, are more and more detailed. The whole effect is of an ever-growing discontinuity between discourse-time and story-time.²³

Once again we move from Rossellini toward Godard, via Bazin.

One aspect of the problem of "synthesis" is related to what Roland Barthes discusses in "The Realistic Effect";

Does everything in a narration have a signifying value and if not, if there exists in the narrative syntagm some non-signifying elements, then, in the final analysis, what is, so to speak, the significance of this non-signification?²⁴

Barthes concludes that such elements signify "reality" and that it is through the signification of such elements that reality is signified. "The pure and simple 'representation' of 'reality', the bare reporting of 'what is' (or 'was') appears thus as a kind of resistance to meaning . . . Flaubert's barometer, Michelet's small door, in the final analysis, say nothing other than 'we are reality'. It is the category of 'reality' and not its contingent contents that is signified."²⁵

A propos *Louis XIV*, it seems likely that some details of costume, some procedures of eating, praying, dressing, some elements of decor and of gesture have little or nothing to do with the film's study of the seizure of power by Louis XIV as such. That is, they may be details that fit into no systems of meaning or paradigms of the work: they serve precisely to convey the reality effect. But we have seen that the doctor's activities relate directly to the seizure of power; so do the rituals of the king's rising, for they reveal how, when, and where the king receives the message "Mazarin wants to see you when you rise"; and affect whether he will receive it in time. Before one says which of the film's details signify systematically and which do not, one must make a careful study of the interaction of ellipsis and synthesis in the film. In short, we will not be able to answer Barthes's question until we answer Bazin's.

Our discussion of Bazin and Rossellini does

not, strictly speaking, prove anything. Its point has been to engage Bazin in a critical discussion that moves toward the present. It has attempted to use Bazin in posing and working on critical problems of the present—rather than lock him up in a completed and (spuriously) unified past, as his devotees tend to do.

If an effort is required to reconnect with Bazin, so that his writings are again suggestive rather than merely an example for textbooks, it is not only because of his devotees. It is due as much to the imposing schools of theory and textual analysis that have arisen between his time and ours. Not these contributions themselves but their effect of separating us from our critical and theoretical past has been quite unfortunate. For the film field to be cut off from Bazin is to be lobotomized in its adolescence. It is, moreover, unnecessary. One or two intellectual operations of a very simple sort are all that are needed to make Bazin available to any analyst today: a rejection of his theoretical realism and a sharp eye for the realist turns of his concrete discussions.

In *Elements of Semiology*, Barthes cites with approval Jakobson's point that "the analyst . . . is better equipped to speak about metaphor than about metonymy, because the metalanguage in which he must conduct his analysis is itself metaphorical, and consequently homogenous with the metaphor which is its object; and indeed there is an abundant literature on metaphor, but next to nothing on metonymy."²⁶ Is it possible that Bazin's writings may some day be reissued as *Studies in Cinematic Metonymy*? Perhaps not, but if the book of that name that does appear is excellent, it will have to come to terms with Bazin.

NOTES

1. Andrew, Dudley, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. ix.
2. Truffaut, François, *The Films in My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 9.
3. Andrew, *op. cit.*, p. x.
4. Truffaut, François, *The 400 Blows* (New York: Grove, 1969), p. 190.
5. Truffaut, François, *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), pp. 8-9.
6. Quoted in Andrew, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-4.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
8. *Film Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 4 (Summer 1972), p. 26.
9. Bazin, André, *What Is Cinema? Vol. II*, translated by Hugh Gray, (Berkeley: California, 1971), at p. 61, p. 16, and p. 93. The *Europa* text is very slight and was not translated by Gray; see *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma*, Tome IV, pp. 97-99.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
12. Godard, Jean-Luc, *Godard on Godard* (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 150.
13. Truffaut, *The Films in My Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-6.
14. Bazin, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.
17. Andrew, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
19. Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse, Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 71-72; 63.
20. Schrader, Paul, "The Rise of Louis XIV," in *Cinema*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 1971), p. 4.
21. MacBean, James Roy, *Film and Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 214-5.
22. Guarner, Jose Luis, *Roberto Rossellini* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 115-6.
23. Chatman, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
24. Barthes, Roland, "The Realistic Effect," translated by Gerald Mead, *Film Reader 3* (February 1978), p. 132.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.
26. Barthes, Roland, *Elements of Semiology* translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), pp. 60-61.

FILM BOOK SURVEY

This yearly round-up of film titles covers basically the period from Summer 1978 to Summer 1979. However, some earlier issues are included, mostly items which have only recently come to our attention.

TO THE DISTANT OBSERVER Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema

By Noël Burch. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979. \$19.50.

Published by the same organization as this magazine, Burch's book cannot be reviewed at length in these pages, but it seems to me an original, theoretically sophisticated, innovative, and readable treatment of Japanese cinema. Burch aims to show how Japanese directors escaped the standard "classic" style of shooting and editing dominant in the west; he rehabilitates the period 1896-1930 as not one of stagnation but of preparation for the "golden age" of 1930-1945. Copiously illustrated, often with the use of frame enlargements. —E.C.